

Testimony on SB 152  
Senate Education and Cultural Resources Committee  
January 12, 2007  
Dr. Robert Ream  
521 Clarke St.  
Helena, MT

Senator Ryan and Members of the Committee:

My name is Bob Ream and I stand today in strong support of SB 152. I spent over 30 years teaching, the last 28 of those at the Forestry School, University of Montana. I also served 16 years in the Montana House and have a great appreciation for the work you do.

I have two older kids who went to a private kindergarten at a Lutheran church in Missoula because there was no public kindergarten. I also have a younger son who went half days to kindergarten in Helena, because that's all that was available. Those experiences were invaluable to my kids and should be available to all Montana kids, regardless of their circumstances. All evidence points to the fact that an early start gives our kids the tools they need to be successful throughout life.

I strongly support the Governor's Best and Brightest postsecondary scholarship program and other scholarship provisions in this bill for post-secondary education. In my 28 years at UM I saw dramatic and devastating increases in tuition that priced many Montanans out of going on to school, even for two-year programs at our colleges of technology. When I started at UM in 1969, and even up through the 1980's, our students could work their way through school, as I did 50 years ago. With a summer job and 10-15 hours work/week during the school year you could pay your way through school.

With the drastic cuts in legislative appropriations during the 1990's and massive increases in tuition, it is impossible to work your way through school today. That's a shame and an embarrassment to this great state. We have priced our own young people out of post-secondary education at the very same time we are telling them that they need it in order to succeed in our global economy. Those that are going on to school are incurring huge amounts of debt, a phenomenon virtually unheard of 20 years ago, and incurring it at the worst time in their lives – starting careers and families and a home.

The Scholarship programs in this bill are a great tool to begin to address the problems of tuition for some of our best and brightest and those most in need. Tuition capping is another great tool. Together they can help put us on the right track toward once again considering post-secondary education a "public good."

Thank you for your consideration and please vote DO PASS on SB 152.

Bob Ream